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ABSTRACT

Social psychological research on attitude/belief similarity points to perceived similarity between people as leading to greater attraction and more favorable evaluations. When applied to the area of performance evaluations, organizational research on raters and ratees has focused primarily on the characteristics of the participants of the evaluation process, and not on their similarities or interaction. To examine the relationship between rater and ratee demographic and work-related characteristics and their interaction on performance ratings, correction officer supervisors and their staff completed a survey which measured demographic and work-related information, attitude and belief similarity, and perceptions of supervisor-officer work relations. Three months later, subjects completed a second survey measuring supervisor and peer ratings of the performance of a focal officer. Complete information was obtained from 26 supervisors and 26 coworkers, matched with 26 focal officers. The results showed that both individual characteristics and the interaction of rater and ratee characteristics and attitudes had a significant effect on performance ratings. Some findings for rater-ratee interactive effects suggest that rater-ratee differences, and the direction of the differences may be more strongly related to performance ratings than are similarities between the rater and the ratee. (NRB)

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Effects of Rater-Ratee Similarity on Performance Ratings

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Effects of Rater-Ratee Similarity on Performance Ratings

Abstract

Much of the social psychological research on attitude/belief similarity points to perceived similarity between people as leading to greater attraction and more favorable evaluations. When applied to the area of performance evaluations, organizational research on raters and ratees has focused primarily on the characteristics of the participants of the evaluation process, and not on their similarities or interaction. The present study examined the effects of rater and ratee demographic work-related attitudes/beliefs, and rater-ratee similarity/agreement on performance ratings. The results indicated that both individual characteristics and the interaction of rater and ratee characteristics/attitudes had a significant effect on performance ratings.

Concern over bias in performance ratings has generally been expressed in attempts to minimize rater error through the design of psychometrically sound rating scales or rater training, and in attempts to better understand the rating process. While distinctive in how they deal with bias, both approaches recognize the importance of rater and ratee characteristics in performance evaluation.

Much of the research on the influence of personal characteristics on performance ratings has focused mainly on the effects of demographic variables, such as rater and ratee race and sex (Lee and Alvares, 1977; London and Poplawski, 1976; Hamner, Kim, Baird, and Bigoness, 1974; Mobley, 1982; Schmitt and Hill, 1977; Terborg and Ilgen, 1975; Huck and Bray, 1976). Although rater and ratee sex and race do not appear to have any consistent relationship with rater behavior (Scherer and Kraiger, 1984; Nieva and Gutek, 1980), there is some evidence of interactive effects of rater and ratee race on evaluation behavior (Kraiger and Ford, in press).

As personal characteristics, race and sex are obvious and easily measured. However, their importance to research on bias in ratings stems from the racial or sexual stereotypes they may evoke which can affect performance evaluations. Research in social psychology has shown that

the perceived similarity (or dissimilarity) of attitudes and beliefs attributed by one individual about another are the basis of many stereotypes and are related to interpersonal attraction and evaluations. In general, people are more attracted to and evaluate more highly people who appear to hold attitudes and beliefs similar to themselves.

Several studies which have manipulated attitude similarity have found that the perceived degree of similarity between two individuals influenced decisions concerning the hiring of an employee (Griffit and Jackson, 1970), choosing a group member with whom to work (Castore and DeNinno, 1976), and the evaluation of performance on a learning task (Smith, Meadow, and Sisk, 1970).

Rater-ratee similarity may not only impact directly on rater evaluation behavior, but might indirectly affect rater behavior by influencing the nature of the rater-ratee relationship. Graen and his colleagues (Dansereau, Haga, and Graen, 1975; Graen, 1976) have postulated that employees who are compatible with their supervisor in terms of work competence, interpersonal skills, and backround characteristics are more likely to have a higher quality relationship with the supervisor than employees who are less compatible. Research supporting this perspective has shown that the quality of

the supervisor-subordinate relationship is positively related to employee evaluations (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975).

This study examined the relationship between rater and ratee demographic and work-related characteristics and their interaction on performance ratings. It was hypothesized that the greater the similarity between rater and ratee, the higher the performance ratings.

Method

Overview

A 25 % sample of correction officer (CO) supervisors, randomly selected from all supervisors working in a state correctional agency, and 3 each of their subordinates participated in the study by responding to two surveys. The first survey was used to collect demographic and work-related information, including attitude and belief similarity and perceptions of supervisor-officer work relations. Three months after the first survey was returned, a second survey was mailed to collect supervisor and peer ratings on the performance of a focal officer.

Surveys were mailed to 53 supervisors and 3 each of their staff (total N = 212). Thirty-three supervisors and at least 2 of their staff returned surveys (total returned = 119). Of the surveys returned, complete information was available from 26 supervisors and 26 coworkers, matched

with 26 focal officers (N = 78).

Measures

Demographic information obtained for supervisors and corrections officers included: sex, race, age group, education level, and time worked at the correctional facility. Job-related information included the perceived organizational influence of CO's, attitudes toward the punishment of criminals, perceived importance of 12 job dimensions in the CO's job, and supervisor-officer work relations.

Perceived organizational influence (8 items) measured the extent of perceived officer influence on personnel and security policy and procedures in the agency and at the facility. Responses to this measure were on a 5 point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a very large extent".

Attitudes toward the punishment of criminals was assessed using a 13 item Thurstone scale developed by Wang and Thurstone (1931, see Shaw and Wright, 1967). Respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement (yes/no) with each item. The average scale value of the items agreed with was calculated for each respondent. The higher the scale value, the harsher the attitude.

Perceived importance of job dimensions was measured on a 6-point scale of importance ranging from "1 = never done" to "6 = most important." The 12 dimensions

comprising this measure were developed from critical incidents obtained for the evaluation of CO job performance as part of another project. Extent of agreement of job dimension importance was measured by taking the absolute value of the difference between matched supervisor and officer importance ratings summed across all 12 dimensions. [1]

Supervisor-officer work relations was assessed with items developed by Graen and his associates in the Vertical Dyad Linkage model of leadership (Dansereau, et al., 1975; Graen and Schiemann, 1978). The six leader-member exchange items were measured on 4-point response scales and included items on supervisor flexibility regarding the CO's job, supervisor's willingness to use his/her power to help the COs, supervisor-CO expectations for CO job performance, and general evaluation of the supervisor-CO relationship. With the exception of the attitudes towards punishment of criminals scale, items for each scale were summed into a scale score.

Similarity indices for demographic and work-related variables were calculated by taking the absolute difference between supervisor and officer scores for each scale. Based on the absolute differences in their responses, a supervisor and CO were more similar (or in

closer agreement), the closer their similarity/agreement score was to zero. A positive relationship between similarity/agreement and performance ratings, then, would be evidenced by a negative correlation. Because supervisors were asked about overall work relations with their staff, the similarity/agreement score for supervisor-officer work relations represented the closeness of the work relationship, as perceived by the officer, to the supervisor's "average" or "overall" work relations with his/her staff.

Behaviorally anchored rating scales, one for each of the 12 CO job dimensions, were used to collect supervisor ratings of officer job performance. Supervisor ratings were summed across the twelve job dimensions. This overall rating was correlated with all of the rater, ratee, and similarity measures [2]. Means, standard deviations, and relevant internal consistency reliabilities for the rater-ratee characteristics, similarity measures, and performance ratings are presented in Table 1.

Results

As shown in Table 1, supervisor ratings of CO performance were significantly related to both rater-ratee characteristics and similarity/agreement. [3] For the ratee, age group and perceived overall subordinate relations were positively related to CO performance ratings, while time worked at the facility was negatively related to CO performance ratings. For the raters, time worked at the facility and perceived organizational influence were negatively related to performance ratings.

Significant correlations were also found for performance ratings and several of the rater/ratee similarity/agreement measures. It will be recalled that a negative correlation would indicate that greater supervisor-officer similarity/agreement was positively related to supervisor ratings of CO performance. This relationship was supported by the negative correlation between performance ratings and similarity/agreement on the perceived importance of job dimensions to the CO's job. The closer the supervisor and the CO were on the perceived importance of the job dimensions, the higher the performance rating given to the CO. Upon closer examination of the relationship of specific job dimension importance agreement and performance ratings, it was found that only their agreement on the importance of

communications in the CO's job was significantly related to supervisor ratings of CO performance ($r = -.43$, $p \leq .05$, between performance rating and supervisor-officer agreement).

Similarity/agreement between supervisors and CO's on attitudes toward the punishment of criminals was also significantly correlated with performance ratings. This positive correlation, however, was opposite to the predicted direction. Greater dissimilarity in attitudes was related to higher performance ratings. This finding suggested that the direction of disagreement between raters and ratees might be more important than the extent of similarity or dissimilarity. The non-significant correlation between matched supervisors and officers on the attitudes measure further indicated that direction of dissimilarity might be more strongly related to supervisor ratings of officer performance than its magnitude.

To test for the effect of direction of dissimilarity/disagreement, actual differences between supervisor and CO for attitudes toward the punishment of criminals, and for all of the similarity/agreement measures were calculated. For each measure, officers were grouped by the direction of the differences between their own and their supervisor's responses. Mean supervisor ratings were then calculated and compared for the two

groups on each scale. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, the direction of the differences of a CO from his/her supervisor was significantly related to performance ratings for attitudes towards the punishment of criminals, time worked at the correctional facility, perceived organizational influence of CO's, and perceived supervisor-officer relations. Average performance ratings were higher for CO's who a) were more, rather than less, lenient than their supervisors in their attitudes toward the punishment of criminals, b) had worked at the correctional facility less than their supervisors, c) perceived that they had less organizational influence than supervisors believed they had, and d) perceived work relations with their supervisor as better than the average work relationship reported by the supervisor. Performance ratings were also significantly higher for CO's who rated communications as more important to the CO's job than their supervisors did.

Discussion

The results of this study provide additional evidence that rater and ratee characteristics are related performance ratings. More importantly, however, the results for rater/ratee similarity provide support for the social psychological and leadership perspectives which

propose that the interaction of individual characteristics affects interpersonal attraction and evaluation. The findings for rater-ratee interactive effects also suggest that dissimilarity, rather than similarity, might be a more important factor in performance evaluations. Specifically, rater-ratee differences, and the direction of the difference from the rater may be more strongly related to performance ratings than are similarities between the rater and ratee. The relative influence of similarity or dissimilarity may depend on the work attitude, belief, or perception on which agreeement is assessed. A determination of which are the relevant attitudes and beliefs may depend, among other things, on the nature of the work performed, the type of organization (public vs. private), and the organization's position regarding the object of the attitude or belief.

Clearly these findings are only suggestive, but they do provide some evidence that aspects of the rater-ratee relationship (in this case between a supervisor and subordinate) may be a significant source of variance in performance evaluations. Further research should focus on within rater differences in performance evaluations for ratees who exhibit varying amounts of dissimilarity on attitude, belief, and perceptual variables.

Footnotes

[1] The twelve job dimensions were: maintenance of weapons and equipment, counseling of prisoners, coordinating of prisoner activity, personal health and hygiene of prisoners, communications (with correctional staff), transportation of prisoners, ticket and report writing, security (housing units), security (visitors), security (facility and perimeter), interactions with other officers, and interactions with prisoners.

[2] An estimate of supervisor rating accuracy was obtained by measuring the interrater reliability of two raters evaluating the performance of a focal officer. Supervisor ratings of a focal officer matched with peer ratings of the same officer yielded a correlation of .53 ($p \leq .05$). This indicated that supervisors and peers were in substantial agreement on performance ratings even though they probably observed the focal's behavior from distinctive perspectives.

[3] Because there were no females in the sample of 26 officers and their supervisors, and only 4 non-white officers, sex and race were not included in the analyses. Females comprised 15% and non-whites 13% of the population of correctional staff from which the present sample was obtained.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, internal consistency reliabilities and correlations for performance ratings and rater-ratee characteristics

	Range	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Performance Rating	7-84	64.68	12.7	(97)																		
Rater Characteristics																						
2. Age	1-5	2.67	.99	36																		
3. Education	1-7	2.88	1.2	-02	26																	
4. Tenure	1-9	5.09	1.8	-32	19	07																
5. Punishment of criminals	.5-10	5.62	.48	-04	05	16	-08															
6. Officer influence	8-40	18.76	7.8	-01	-17	-11	11	18	(93)													
7. Subordinate relations	6-24	14.24	4.2	49	35	-25	07	-13	07	(84)												
Ratee Characteristics																						
8. Age		2.52	.91	14	-15	20	07	-24	04	17												
9. Education		2.52	1.3	09	16	-02	-05	08	-04	-13	-25											
10. Tenure		4.94	1.9	-44	-04	-06	57	-06	25	12	54	-17										
11. Punishment of criminals		5.68	.79	08	-15	36	-35	10	-16	-06	-16	-07	-25									
12. Own influence		14.12	6.0	-40	07	-34	49	08	19	-01	-12	-05	30	-39	(87)							
13. Supervisor relations		13.82	4.43	22	08	-08	05	01	-13	-15	18	-18	-03	-15	01	(81)						
Similarity/Agreement	Max. Diff.																					
14. Age	4	1.06	.97	04	58	03	38	-16	-16	28	36	-12	25	-27	-04	14						
15. Education	6	1.45	1.15	-17	-06	06	-06	-19	-11	-13	19	-16	-09	12	-29	-02	34					
16. Tenure	8	1.42	.94	11	33	07	28	04	-28	20	07	-18	-05	09	-02	18	45	-04				
17. Punishment of criminals	9.5	.64	.60	33	13	03	02	18	08	-01	03	-10	13	25	12	04	-20	-29	-23			
18. Job dimension importance	60	14.15	6.1	-29	-14	35	07	-04	-03	-20	20	41	16	10	-11	-23	04	03	17	-25		
19. Officer influence	32	8.03	5.8	-22	-43	-02	-20	-13	54	-09	-16	-26	-10	-13	-13	-16	-25	17	-16	-23	04	
20. Supervisor-officer relations	18	4.82	3.3	20	01	-03	-16	-07	-06	05	15	10	-23	12	-55	-26	12	13	40	-11	18	-06

Note. Significant correlations are underlined. $r \geq .23$, $p \leq .10$; $r \geq .31$, $p \leq .05$. Internal consistency reliabilities are shown in parentheses. Max. Diff.= Maximum Difference.

[a] Absolute value of the difference between supervisor and officer; the smaller the difference (closer to zero), the greater the similarity/agreement.

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Table 2

Mean performance ratings grouped by the direction of the difference of CO response from supervisor response

	Supervisor - CO > 0	Supervisor - CO < 0	t
Age group	63.61 (9)	61.99 (8)	- .49
Education level	60.96 (11)	62.63 (6)	.45
Tenure	65.88 (12)	61.08 (12)	-2.15**
Officer influence	67.34 (15)	59.13 (10)	-3.78**
Supervisor-officer relations	60.79 (12)	69.63 (11)	3.91**
Importance of communications in COs job	59.78 (10)	64.92 (10)	1.97*

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$

Note: Number of COs in each group is shown in parentheses. Student's t-statistic based on pooled variance estimate.